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# A Modern Elegy

A few thoughts of many master minds,
Arrayed today for those
of other kinds.

*By*
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The town clock marks the close of business day,
The hurrying crowds push eagerly towards home,
Each street car loaded wends its devious way,
And I am left the empty streets to roam.

The street lamps lighten up the deep'ning gloom,
But windows dark attract no wondering gaze,
And so I go up to my humble room
To meditate awhile, midst dark'ning haze.

An ambient cat upon a neighb'ring stair,
Inspired, no doubt, with feline thrills of bliss,
Encores in dulcet tones; now splits the air!
With passing charms of its own catliness.

O would some god, enchanted wand in hand,
Stand ready, in our hours of perturbation,
To tune our hearing cords to understand
The jarring notes of life's inexplication.

So lacking this, I once again conclude
To seek repose of mind upon the street;
In hope to find in quest or solitude
Some subject thoughtful, or, adventure meet.

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And as I pass along, a tavern door
  Invites with glittering front the passer-by,
To drown his sorrows from its ample store
  Of liquids, which appeal to throats so dry.

O Omar, in your day, did tavern gate
  And sparkling wares entice the human throng?
Did mixed insidious liquors or the "straight"
  Uplift your quatrains to such heights of song?

Full many a glass of amber beer supreme,
  Unfathomed depths of human woe has stilled.
Full many a thirst of desert's parch extreme
  Is quenched by that, with which the mind is killed.

So caution brother when you deal with fire,
  Remember temperance, in act and speech.
Let not your will succumb to fond desire,
  But formulate a plan embracing each.

Some folks, of course, withal decry as evil
  Most everything in life, both food and love.
Some say to even think of things, the devil
  Will surely keep us from our home above.

The love of money has been for many ages
  Proclaimed as "root of evil," think a bit.
What I maintain from talks with many sages,
  Not love of money, but the lack of it.

But this digression opens up such questions,
  That to continue there will be no end.
On, therefore, let us press without exceptions,
  And strictly thenceforth to our theme attend.

And so again the muddy street I ford,
  And thinking meanwhile if the moor and fen
And other views, which rural scenes afford,
  Give wider range of thought than haunts of men.

I wonder much, if He, who forms world's structures,
  And notices the earth's each changing phase,
Sees atoms form kaleidoscopic figures,
  Which seem to us phantasmagoric maze.

'Tis wonderful to view in contemplation
  The many types of man, and what's his will
More wondrous still, the kind of avocation
  Which each employs, his mission to fulfil.

The noble Greek, whose deeds of ancient fame
And works of art and literature enchant—
Ye gods Olympian! hang your heads in shame;
"Ham an'; One up;" a cheap joint restaurant.

The son of sunny Italy, which teems
With palace, sculpture, paintings through the land;
Great Caesar! Dante! Angelo! It seems
He runs, I blush to say, a peanut stand.

The solemn Hebrew, he of chosen race
To lead the world triumphant and suborned:
O Prophet, know you not that at his place,
That things we wear, and jewelry are pawned?

The worthy Celt, he of the Emerald Isle,
Whose kings trod proudly once through Tara's halls,
While songs and lutes and lyres and harps beguile,
Now sports a "billy;" a whistle for his calls.

O Athens, Rome, Jerusalem, behold!
The sons of sons of yours of yesterday.
O Erin, is there not some elfin god of old
Whose power invoked could change our destiny?

Sad, sad it is that nations rise and fall;
That persons, families, e'en not one's exempt
From troubles, trials, some may lose their all,
Which on recovery bent, make brave attempt.

What are the longings, what the fondest dreams,
The unrevealed desires of human breast?
Success, at times, brings happiness it seems,
While failure means a human soul's distrest.

It is not meet for me to preach or tell
Of creeds of men, their actions, holiness
In cloistered monastery or hermit's cell,
Or buried in the huts of loneliness.

My own opinion would not change the world;
Its manners, customs, thinking, sensuousness.
Time and events, which rapidly have whirled,
Have faced just now with great portentiousness.

But stop, 'tis not my purpose here to dwell
On treaties, commerce, policies of nations.
These things had best be left to those so well
Befitted for their wise determinations.

What I, in humble vein desire to show,
Is what befronts us in our occupation.
With hopes, that personal traits developed slow,
Will sometime have effect upon the nation.

And ye who came to scoff, and sneer a bit
At satire, plagiarism, in a serio-comic way;
I may quotation use, because they fit;
But satire's over, so now "remain to pray."

And we will not in this attempt to find
Sermons in stones, or books in running brooks,
Or study nature, its secrets to unwind,
But thoughtfully to consider human books.

A hero therefore with your kind permit
I'll introduce, as this befits my plan,
Omitting nation, family, and to-wit:
I'll simply designate him—Gentleman.

He boasts no blood, nor vaunts opinions loud,
His attitude, while that of manliness,
Is modesty, though by right he might be proud,
And to all men his manner's kindliness.

Can painter's thoughts inspire for honor's fame,
Can poets dream in fields elysian,
Can sculptor's art in bust or tablet frame
A higher type than that of gentleman?

Can riches, power, or other earthly aid;
Can brief authority, which clothes a man;
Can fashion, jewels, silk or rich brocade
Confer the rank of that of gentleman?

Is coat of arms or diadem emblazed,
Or fabled ancestry, gods or Vatican;
Are rulers, princes, dukes, or lords bedazed
Of higher rank, than that of gentleman?

I care not how much blood of azure hue,
Of Bourbon, Nassau, York, Castilian;
If in those veins there courses not the true
Rich crimson blood of that of gentleman.

You'll find him everywhere upon the globe;
In forests wild, in fields, on ocean's span,
In princely palace and in mud adobe,
On streets, in shops, yet he's a gentleman.

So you who sneer, and scoff, and prate you're not
A Greek, a Hebrew, Celt, Italian;
Remember, that though lowly be his lot,
Perhaps, at heart, he may be gentleman.

Much good is found in nearly every man.
The bad sometimes by passions may inflame,
The truth's so natural, that the life's but plan
To simulate the truth's enduring fame.

The well-known principles of truth and right
Seem sacrificed, at times, for creed and gain.
Fanatics' minds, with raging fire alight,
Make mole-hills mountains, depths instead of plain.

To some, the dance is typical of evil,
To others, meat's taboo, "Thou shalt not kill";
To many, cards, "invented by the devil";
Quite often liquor, vat, and press, and still.

Ye sects innumerable, strong on revelation,
Heredity, doctrine, exclusive sacred rite,
Think twice on things of merely speculation;
Mayhap you're wrong, perhaps your brother's right.

Suppose he be a clerk, on nervous tension,
That needing Sunday, in his week of toil,
For pastime, sport and innocent diversion;
Will you his day of relaxation spoil?

Suppose he be a careworn, lonesome workman,
Who needs companions and a cup of cheer.
Shall you, upright, strict religious kirkman,
Whose cellar's amply stored, deny him beer?

Ye preachers, who oft talk of saint and halo,
And preach in high-flown phrase Christianity,
To many who are decked for fashion show,
Come down a little; proclaim humanity.

Reformers, solons, jurists, as you sit,
On rostrum, pulpit, or in legislative halls;
Think not your feeble argument, or writ
Will still the voice that human nature calls.

My rural friends, who think that city folks
Are "fit for treason, strategem and spoils;"
Think of the havoc, harm, one worm provokes
To sweets, for which the active beehive toils.

My lady fair, too often cold and sometimes proud,
Kindness, like "mercy, is not strained,"
And doubly blesses, those who give and those endowed
Endeared on earth, by angel choir's refrained.

O hoary age, whose passions days are o'er,
Remember now thy days of long ago,
When all was springtime, bud and leaf and flower,
They are now enveloped in a pall of snow.

Remember ye, that boast of what you've done,
That you are going to be a long time dead;
That evil which you do today lives on.
Therefore, to gentlemen, enough is said.

Then hail to youth, sweet springtime of life,
And hail to gentlemen, who excuse its flaws.
But damned be kill-joys, who would stir up strife;
To hell with all the sanctimonious laws.

And so goodnight, a sweet goodnight to you,
Refreshing sleep to you who suffer pain,
And if my muse displeases, why adieu!
But if desired she may return again.

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